

Tudor Women of Power - Recommended Reading and Listening

You don't need to do any reading before joining Tudor Women of Power. However, if you'd like to explore the lives of the women we'll be discussing, I've put together some recommended books, articles, websites and podcasts.

Most of the online resources are free, and I've tried to recommend books that are available in paperback or ebook rather than expensive academic editions.

Recommended books

General Tudor women's history

- **The Lives of Tudor Women by Elizabeth Norton** - An accessible introduction to women's experiences in Tudor England, from childhood and marriage to work, religion and widowhood. An excellent way to understand the opportunities and restrictions faced by women during this period.
- **Shakespeare's Sisters: Four Women Who Wrote the Renaissance** by Ramie Targoff - A fascinating exploration of four remarkable women writers, including Mary Sidney Herbert. It examines how women developed their literary talents and established intellectual identities in a society dominated by men.
- **Women of Action in Tudor England by Pearl Hogrefe** – “Nine remarkable women march across these pages just as they marched through the Tudor age, stamping it with the force of their characters and personalities. Each of the women discussed here had both the desire and drive to accomplish something worthy outside the limits of hearth and home. Included are profiles of Mildred Cecil, Lady Burghley; Anne Cooke, Lady Bacon; Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury; Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk; and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke.”
This can be borrowed at
<https://archive.org/details/womenofactionint0000hogr/page/n1/mode/2up>

Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk

- **Henry VIII's Last Love: The Extraordinary Life of Katherine Willoughby** - David Baldwin - A readable biography covering Katherine's marriages, religious convictions, court connections and exile during Mary I's reign.

Gertrude Courtenay, Marchioness of Exeter

- **The Forgotten Tudor Women: Gertrude Courtenay, Wife and Mother of the Last Plantagenets** by Sylvia Barbara Soberton - A biography of a woman whose family connections, religious loyalties and political relationships placed her in considerable danger during Henry VIII's reign.

The Cooke Sisters

- **The Cooke Sisters: Education, Piety and Politics in Early Modern England** by Gemma Allen - The principal modern study of these five highly educated sisters. Allen examines

their intellectual achievements, religious beliefs, political networks and influence within Elizabethan society.

Bess of Hardwick

- **Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth by Mary S. Lovell** – This is my main recommendation for Bess. It's a detailed and engaging biography tracing Bess's rise from relatively modest circumstances to become one of Elizabethan England's wealthiest and most influential women.
- **Bess of Hardwick and Her Circle** by Maud Stepney Rawson (1910) - An older biography exploring Bess's life, family and connections with Elizabethan society. It can be read at <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/65787>

Blanche Parry

- **Mistress Blanche: Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante by Ruth Elizabeth Richardson** - A detailed account of Blanche's long service to Elizabeth I, her responsibilities within the royal household, her family connections and her influence at court. Available through specialist booksellers and print-on-demand channels. I bought my copy from Lulu.com - <https://www.lulu.com/shop/ruth-elizabeth-richardson/mistress-blanche-queen-elizabeth-is-confidante/paperback/product-14m9vg7d.html?page=1&pageSize=4> Also see [Blanche Parry.com](http://BlancheParry.com) – the author's website.

Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke

- **Shakespeare's Sisters: Four Women Who Wrote the Renaissance by Ramie Targoff** – This is my main recommendation as it places Mary's achievements as a poet, translator and literary patron alongside those of other remarkable Renaissance women.
- **Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke by Frances Berkeley Young** - An older biography of Mary Sidney (1912), available to read online - <https://dn760106.eu.archive.org/0/items/marysidneycounte00younuoft/marysidneycounte00younuoft.pdf>

Free articles and online resources

Katherine Willoughby

- **John Foxe's Acts and Monuments** - Foxe's account of Katherine's exile during Mary I's reign is one of the most influential historical narratives about her. It is a contemporary Protestant account and should be read with that perspective in mind. See <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe/> and <https://www.exclassics.com/foxe/foxintro.htm>

Gertrude Courtenay

- **"The Turbulent Life of Gertrude Courtenay"** by Sylvia Barbara Soberton - An accessible article by Gertrude's modern biographer, exploring her court career and her relationships with prominent Tudor figures. See <https://thetudors.substack.com/p/the-turbulent-life-of-gertrude-courtenay>

The Cooke Sisters

Mildred Cooke

- “Mildred Cecil (née Cooke): The Forgotten Tudor Powerhouse Behind William Cecil” - Video at <https://www.tudorsociety.com/mildred-cecil-nee-cooke-the-forgotten-tudor-powerhouse-behind-william-cecil/>

Anne Cooke

- “Lady Anne Bacon (née Cooke) 1527/8-1610” – Article at <https://www.tudorsociety.com/lady-anne-bacon-nee-cooke-1527-8-1610/>

Elizabeth Cooke

- “Elizabeth Russell, Keeper of Donnington Castle” – article at <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/donnington-castle/history/elizabeth-russell/>

Bess of Hardwick

There are several excellent free resources for Bess:

- English Heritage: Bess of Hardwick - <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/women-in-history/bess-of-hardwick>
- Folger Shakespeare Library: “Bess of Hardwick, Elizabethan Power Player” - <https://www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/bess-of-hardwick-elizabethan-power-player/>
- Bess of Hardwick’s Letters - <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/>
- Folger Shakespeare Library: “Exploring Bess of Hardwick’s Letters” - <https://www.folger.edu/blogs/collation/exploring-bess-of-hardwicks-letters/>

Blanche Parry

- Dictionary of Welsh Biography: Blanche Parry - <https://www.biography.wales/article/s7-PARR-BLA-1508.html>
- Westminster Abbey: Blanche Parry - <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/blanche-parry>
- Ruth Elizabeth Richardson’s Blanche Parry website - <https://www.blancheparry.com/>

Mary Sidney Herbert

- Poetry Foundation: Mary Sidney Herbert - <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>

Podcasts and listening

- Ramie Targoff on Shakespeare’s Sisters - <https://www.folger.edu/podcasts/shakespeare-unlimited/shakespeares-sisters-targoff/>
- Naomi Miller on Mary Sidney and Imperfect Alchemist - <https://www.folger.edu/podcasts/shakespeare-unlimited/mary-sidney-imperfect-chemist-miller/>

- Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke – Stuff You Missed in History Class - <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/105-stuff-you-missed-in-histor-21124503/episode/mary-sidney-herbert-countess-of-pembroke-93800684/>
- Tudor Times on Mary Sidney - <https://www.englandcast.com/2017/08/episode-083-mary-sidney/>
- Talking Tudors, Episode 246: The Extraordinary Life of Catherine Willoughby - <https://talkingtudors.podbean.com/e/episode-246-the-extraordinary-life-of-catherine-willoughby-with-victoria-male/>
- Gertrude Courtenay, Marchioness of Exeter with Sylvia Barbara Soberton - The Tudor Chest Podcast - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlBuWqQupY>
- Exploring Hardwick Hall with Suzannah Lipscomb, History Hit – This can be watched/listened to if you have a History Hit subscription at <https://access.historyhit.com/suzannah-lipscomb/videos/hardwick-hall-1> and is also available on Prime Video.
- Bess of Hardwick: Elizabethan England's Richest Woman - <https://podcasts.apple.com/mx/podcast/bess-of-hardwick-elizabethan-englands-richest-woman/>
- Bess of Hardwick with Kate Hubbard - <https://podscan.fm/podcasts/herstory-5/episodes/bess-of-hardwick-with-kate-hubbard>
- Lady Elizabeth Russell: Keeper of Donnington Castle - <https://playlist.megaphone.fm/?e=EHE1470033263>
- Abbey History: 1565 - 1609 Lady Hoby's Legacy (Aka Dowager Lady Russell) - <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1566221/episodes/8529390-abbey-history-1565-1609-lady-hobyes-legacy-aka-dowager-lady-russell>
- Elizabeth's Mother Figures: Blanche Parry and Kat Ashley - Renaissance English History Podcast - <https://www.englandcast.com/2024/10/episode-233-elizabeths-mother-figures-blanche-parry-and-kat-ashley/>